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ABSTRACT

This booklet was developed to guide school pesonnel who come into contact with pupils who need help because of violence in their homes. It provides information on spouse abuse and its effects on children, suggests ways for school personnel to educate students about the problem, and promotes the use of local service agencies designed to assist violent families. Programs developed in New York are described, including telephone hotlines and emergency shelters. The paper defines the role of the educational system and presents guidelines to help school personnel recognize clues to family violence and confront the issue. An annotated bibliography is included which can be used to develop curriculum and in-service education programs. Although some of the material is geographically specific, the booklet provides a useful, general introduction for school personnel. (JAC)

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ADDRESSING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: A GUIDE FOR SCHOOL PERSONNEL

OCTOBER 1982

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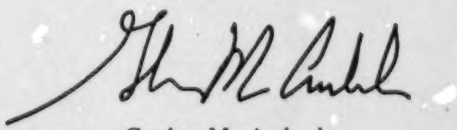
The University of the State of New York
THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
Albany, New York 12234

October 1982

Commissioner Ambach's Note to Teachers and School Administrators

The Governor's Task Force on Domestic Violence, local school administrators, and State Education Department staff members developed this booklet to guide school personnel who come into contact with pupils who need help because of violence in their homes. I hope you and your colleagues will tailor the suggestions and guidelines in this booklet to your school district's needs and use the booklet's bibliography to develop curriculum and in-service education programs for your district's staff.

Domestic violence affects many children and families in New York State. School personnel, working with other agencies, can help stop the cyclical pattern found in violent families by teaching children how to solve problems in nonviolent ways. We hope this booklet will help you establish programs in your district to help those subjected to domestic violence.



Gordon M. Ambach

Introduction

Domestic violence is the physical and/or psychological abuse of one member of a family by another. This abuse is a crime.

Violence in the family affects all religious, economic, racial, and cultural groups and has serious consequences for safety and security in the streets and in the schools. Statistics show that more than one household in six has been the scene of a person striking his or her spouse,[1] that there are over 144,000 marriages in New York State in which at least one serious interspousal assault leads to visible injury each year[2] and that in 1980 almost 20 percent of the homicide victims in New York State were murdered by members of their families.[3] It is clear that domestic violence affects all of us, either directly as we suffer its consequences in our homes or indirectly as a result of the enormous social and legal problems it creates.

This booklet provides information on spouse abuse and its effects on children, suggests ways for school personnel to educate students about the problem, and promotes the use of local service agencies designed to assist violent families.

The Extent of the Problem

The American family has long been thought of as a "haven in a heartless world."[4] However, each year in the United States at least six million men, women and children are victims of domestic violence—severe physical and psychological abuse inflicted by members of their families. "In fact, it would be hard to find a group or institution in American society in which violence is more of an everyday occurrence than it is within the family."[5] This violence ranges from a slap or a shove to a bullet wound. A significant number of domestic-violence incidents involve weapons: guns, knives, clubs.

Domestic violence occurs in all segments of society. A study of abused women who used a shelter and a counseling program in New York City revealed that the backgrounds of the women victims, and of their abusers, were so diverse as to defy categorization. Assaults were recorded among women of all ages, races, and social and economic groups.

How common are incidents of domestic violence? Family violence is one of the most hidden and under-reported of all crimes, and reliable data have not been systematically collected. However, in a random survey in Kentucky, more than 20 percent of the women respondents reported having experienced at least one incident of domestic violence.[6] Nationally, the FBI Uniform Crime Reports for 1978 show that one out of every five homicide victims was murdered by a member of his or her family.[7] These data, in addition to those reported in the introduction to this booklet, demonstrate clearly that violence in the home is not rare.

Domestic violence threatens not only the physical and psychological welfare of all family members, but the family unit as well. Statistics from the New York State Family Court for 1981 show that 15,184 petitions for orders of protection were filed by wives against husbands and 1,220 were filed by husbands against wives.[8] Also, physical cruelty was cited as the reason for over 40 percent of the divorces in New York State in 1980.[9]

Domestic Violence: Risk to Children

The prospect of immediate physical injury or death at the hands of a loved one is obviously cause for alarm. However, domestic violence has other serious consequences. Family violence is cyclical and intergenerational. Children who grow up in violent families have learned to associate love with

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[1] R. J. Gelles, S.K. Steinmetz, and M.A. Strauss, *Behind Closed Doors: Violence in the American Family*. Garden City: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1980.

[2] Governor's Task Force on Domestic Violence. Report to the Governor and the Legislature, 1980.

[3] New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services. Crime and Justice Annual Report, 1981.

[4] Christopher Lasch. *Haven in a Heartless World*. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1977.

[5] S.K. Steinmetz and M.A. Strauss. In S.K. Steinmetz and M.A. Strauss (Eds.), *Violence in the Family*. New York: Harper and Row Publishers, Inc., 1974.

[6] Mark A. Schulman (Louis Harris and Associates). A Survey of Spousal Violence Against Women in Kentucky. U.S. Government Printing Office, 1979.

[7] U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation. Uniform Crime Reports for the United States, 1978.

[8] *Report of the Chief Administrator of the Courts* for 1981. Table 3-68, p. 3-93.

[9] Marriage, Upstate New York; Dissolution of Marriage, New York State 1978-80. New York State Department of Health, Bureau of Health Statistics, 1982.

violence and are apt to repeat the family patterns, becoming abusive adults or victims of abuse as adults.

As an educator, you will come into contact with children from violent homes. Many of these children have lived in families under chronic stress for years. E. Hiberman and K. Muson in "Sixty Battered Women" provide a startling view of the lives of the children of violent homes:

> "Whether the children are themselves battered or are onlookers to parental violence, they are deeply affected by the climate of violence in which they live. They are witnesses to drunken rages, savage assaults, strangling, shooting, stabbing, and rape. Emotional neglect and abuse are the norms, as is the chaos of frequent separations..."[10]

The fear and insecurity felt by children living in such homes can affect their academic performance and their relationships with other people, both inside and outside school. Responses to violence will, of course, vary from child to child. However, it is reasonable to assume that a child who witnesses such abuse in his or her home may have difficulty concentrating on schoolwork and may have behavioral problems in school.

Domestic violence cannot be contained within the family, and students who are affected by domestic violence suffer in their psychic, social and intellectual development. Their problems, which are manifested both inside and outside the classroom, affect the teachers and peers who have contact with these students daily.

These children have learned that violence is acceptable and will often use violence to resolve conflicts in their relationships with their peers. The serious psychological effects of family violence on children include developmental difficulties, anxiety and confusion, manic tendencies, substance abuse, and delinquency. For example, as a result of their experiences in violent homes, children in family-violence shelters engage in behavior which includes: disorganized activity, fantasy and avoidance in problem-solving, aggression, hypochondria and psychosomatic complaints, and withdrawal. These difficulties can lead to further academic and behavioral problems and may create greater risks for the affected student and the wider school community.

Effective responses to the problem may greatly increase the child's well-being, improve the way he or she responds in the classroom, and, ultimately, enhance the welfare of the school community. The child who is confused, guilt-ridden and isolated is often forgotten. These children do not have their feelings recognized nor do they receive support in coping with their family problems at home. The support of school personnel can go far toward helping such a child cope with family problems.

New York State's Present Responses

New York State has recognized the seriousness of domestic violence and is making progress toward providing effective relief and protection for those who suffer from it.

In New York State, "...disorderly conduct, harassment, menacing, reckless endangerment, an assault or attempted assault between spouses or between members of the same family or household" (Family Court Act, Section 812) are defined as "family offenses." These illegal acts may be prosecuted as civil wrongs in the Family Court of the State of New York, or, if the victim chooses and the prosecutor concurs, a "family offense" may be prosecuted in an appropriate criminal court. The Family Court may issue orders of protection directing the offender to cease the offensive conduct; the criminal court also may issue orders of protection and, after conviction, may impose criminal penalties, fines and jail sentences.

New York State has established a statewide toll-free Domestic Violence Telephone Hotline which is operated by the New York State Coalition Against Domestic Violence, an organization of community activists and providers of services to those who suffer from domestic violence.

The Hotline is open 24 hours a day and provides crisis counseling, information and referrals and serves as a resource for both victims and those concerned about them throughout the State. Victims who receive Hotline services may remain anonymous. The number of this Hotline is 1-800-942-6906.

Safety is one of the most pressing needs of all victims of domestic violence. In 1978, New York State began to respond to this need by developing a system of shelter programs for battered women and

[10] E. Hilberman and K. Munson. "Sixty Battered Women." *Victimology*, 1977–78, 2 (3 and 4), 463.

their children. These shelters offer counseling and support groups for all family members and may help the women as they use the legal, medical and social service systems to end the violence. The respite and safety of these shelters provide an opportunity for these women to make decisions to preserve their families free of violence, or, where appropriate, to live independently.

THE ROLE OF THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

In 1979, Governor Hugh L. Carey of New York issued Executive Order #90, in which he established a Task Force on Domestic Violence to "advise the Governor and the Legislature as to the most effective ways for state government to respond to the critical law-enforcement and social problems posed by domestic violence." Among the many recommendations it made in 1980, the Task Force suggested that "preventive and educational curriculum materials should be prepared by the State Education Department for use in New York's elementary and secondary schools."

As a first step toward achieving this goal and in recognition of the serious impact of domestic violence on students, the State Education Department recommends that schools develop both educational programs on domestic violence and policy guidelines to help students from violent families.

Some schools may have developed Child Abuse and Neglect Policies and school personnel are already familiar with the child abuse laws and obligations for reporting suspected cases. This booklet focuses on spouse abuse, specifically on how to respond to the needs of children who witness parental violence in their homes. Since there is no mandatory-reporting law regarding spouse abuse, the most effective response which school personnel can make is to provide referrals to those local agencies which offer counseling and services to families in crisis.

The school is the one institution which has continuing and long-term contact with every child. As such, it may provide the first opportunity for recognizing the problems affecting students and may be able to provide education aimed at preventing future violence, in and out of the home.

Students who live in homes where violence occurs often have behavioral or academic problems. Schools can help such students confront and overcome their problems by fostering an awareness of the unacceptability of violence and developing preventive education programs. Education programs can take many forms, viz.: the use of guest lecturers in classes, school-wide assemblies on violence, production and distribution of posters, and research projects on family violence as a part of classroom work. Any education program about domestic violence should convey the message that violence is unacceptable and that there are alternatives to violence for resolving conflicts and dealing with anger and frustration.

Clues for Recognition

To recognize and respond effectively to domestic violence as it affects students, all school personnel should be sensitive to clues that may be indicative of violence in the home. Some of the most common behavior and academic problems experienced by children can have their origins in family violence. Truancy, aggression, or failure to complete assignmens might signal the existence of this problem. Children in play situations, class discussions and peer relationships may exhibit signs of the stress, anxiety, aggressiveness and withdrawal which are often associated with violence in the home.

However, the student's emotional reactions and behavioral problems can be symptomatic of many different problems. While the presence of any single factor should not therefore lead to the conclusion that there is family violence, it should alert you to the possibility that this may be an issue in the student's family.

Finally, remember that a student who tells school staff members about violence should be believed. It is highly unlikely that a child would make up a story of physical or sexual abuse in his or her home.

School personnel should be prepared to respond by referring students to the appropriate person within the school.

Confronting the Issue

Domestic violence is a sensitive and highly emotional subject. It is important to be aware of your feelings about family relationships and family violence. It is also important to remind yourself that some people still subscribe to myths about domestic violence and are unable to discuss the subject objectively. One myth which many maintain is that

wives who have been beaten must have provoked their husbands—that the beatings are justified by something the wives have done or said.

Violence is the problem of the violent person; provocation is the excuse but is not a legal defense. Many abusers grew up in a home in which they witnessed violence between their parents and in which physical violence was seen as the ultimate and most effective method to display power, resolve conflicts and handle feelings of anger and frustration. Unfortunately, many of the victims of abuse also fall prey to the victim-blaming myth and may believe they are responsible for the violence. These feelings of responsibility and guilt often cause the victim to stay in the violent home and suffer from continuing and escalating abuse.

It is your role as an educator to remain sensitive to the possibilty that domestic violence may be affecting a student. When working with victims of domestic violence it may be helpful to be aware of their primary need for safety and security, for the creation of options and for the development of a sense of control over their own lives. The best response to have toward children who may be experiencing violence in the home is that it is the violence that is disapproved of, not the family and its members. It is critical that you communicate to the child your concern and support in a non-judgmental manner.

The efforts of school personnel to help these students will be the first step in what may be a long and sometimes frustrating process for all involved. However, each supportive response helps the whole society to eliminate family violence and make the home a gentler and safer place for all family members.

Guidelines for School Personnel

The State Education Department and the Governor's Task Force on Domenstic Violence recommend that schools develop procedural guidelines regarding responses to and education about domestic violence. Schools may use the following statewide guidelines for school districts as the basis for local guidelines to help provide information to school personnel on how to handle domestic-violence-related problems:

- All school personnel should become familiar with the domestic violence issue. Duplicate this material and distribute it throughout the school. Encourage school personnel to use the literature and film resources listed in the enclosed bibliographies.
- School personnel should remain alert and sensitive to students' behavior for signs of the effects of family violence.
- One individual from the administrative or pupil personnel services staff may be chosen to coordinate the school's information-gathering and referral efforts. This person should be available to discuss, with other school personnel, individual student problems that may be caused by family violence.

Some schools may have written Child Abuse and Neglect Policies. A school's staff member may have been assigned as a liaison person with local Child Protective Services. This staff member or any other person chosen by the school principal may be given the responsibility to become knowledgeable about domestic violence and to serve as a liaison person with local providers of services to those who suffer domestic violence. The responsibilities of this person may include the following:

- Compile information on local programs and services available for families living with violence.
- Contact local service providers to develop channels of communication and cooperation between the school and service providers. Local service providers can offer assistance and information regarding identification of domestic violence as a problem affecting a student as well as suggested responses and referrals for the student and his or her family.
- Post throughout the school the phone number and other information about the toll-free statewide Domestic Violence Hotline. An adult or child can obtain information, counseling and referrals anonymously by calling the Hotline. The number is 1-800-942-6906.
- Monitor cases in which students have been identified as living in violent homes.
- Promote a preventive education campaign in the school. Local service providers and the statewide Hotline can also serve as resources for the preventive education program.

If teachers and other school personnel become aware or suspect that a student is having problems in school which are related to violence in the home, the teacher should contact the person the school has designated to deal with this problem. This person, through the established contacts with local service providers, will ascertain the next step for helping students who have problems.

The following are suggestions for action which school personnel can take:

- The teacher and the principal should discuss what help may be appropriate for the student and/or the family. Factors to consider include the age of the child, the family circumstances of that child, and the available resources in the school and the community. The school should also assess the potential danger to the child. The parent may be upset if he or she suspects that the child has told people outside the family about incidents of family violence.
- The teacher and the principal or the principal's designee should talk with the student to determine if the problems the student is having in school may be affected by violence in the home.
- The student may be referred for assistance within the school in relation to his or her school-related problems.
- The student may be referred for assistance outside the school. However, outside referrals may ultimately require parental consent, since most agencies will not provide services to a child without such consent. At all times the confidentiality of this matter should be maintained.
- If a student openly shares information about violence in his or her family, and is of appropriate age and maturity, then it may be advisable to provide such a student with information about known local services which he or she can use independently. This could include information about, and the telephone number of, the statewide Domestic Violence Hotline. Students should be told that they can call anonymously for counseling and referrals.

In concert with other helping agencies, education professionals can become an integral part of a multi-faceted effort to help students who suffer from violence in their homes. Further, the school can become the leader in an educational effort to prevent future violence.

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Friends Peace Committee, *The Friendly Classroom For a Small Planet: A Handbook on Creative Approaches to Living and Problem Solving For Children*, Friends Peace Committee, 1515 Cherry Street, Philadelphia, PA 19102, $7.45. This book offers numerous, carefully selected activities to promote cooperation, communication, affirmation of the individual and conflict resolution. The theory and planning chapters will be helpful to Children's Program Directors.

Frost, Linda, *The Battered Women and the Child*, Linda Frost, 46 Welkes Road, Apt. 220, Vernon, CT 06066, $1.50. This little book of 16 one-page stories would be ideal for reading aloud to older children. It covers a variety of feelings of children who witness their parents fighting violently: the anger, love and fear for each parent, the double-binds, the constant need to be careful. The speech is colloquial, the issues real. Guaranteed to trigger one-to-one or group discussion.

Galambos-Stone, Jeanette, *A Guide to Discipline*, National Association for Education of Young Children, 1834 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C. 20009, $1.50. One of the simplest, most straightforward books on the subject of "how to" and the "bible" of early childhood teachers, this pamphlet gives down-to-earth suggestions and samples of positive discipline statements which have proven useful to parents and those who work with victims of spouse abuse.

Gelles, Richard, *Family Violence*, Sage Publication. Beverly Hills, 1979.

Judson, Stephanie (ed.), *A Manual on Non-Violence and Children*, Nonviolence and Children Program, Friends Peace Committee, 1515 Cherry Street, Philadelphia, PA 19102, $5.50. This is an excellent book of activities for children which promote positive self-image and personal growth as well as group cooperation.

National Technical Assistance Center on Family Violence, *About Wife Abuse*, The Domestice Violence Project, Inc., 202 W. Huron, Suite #101, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48014. This is a short pamphlet which provides general information on domestic violence, using illustrations and simple language. It would be appropriate for use with children who are beginning to learn about the existence of family violence. The main focus of this pamphlet is on wife abuse.

National Technical Assistance Center on Family Violence, *How Do You Answer That One?* The Domestic Violence Project, Inc., 202 E. Huron, Suite #101, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48010. This pamphlet is designed as a guide to community education and public relations for people who will be working with families. It provides suggestions for responses to some of the most commonly asked questions about domestic violence. It would be a very useful guide for educators who are discussing the issue in the classroom.

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United Church of Christ Committee for Racial Justice, *Danny's Difficult Days*, 105 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016, $.45. This comic-style book is the story of an abused child, designed to encourage hope in children that if you tell the right people the abuse will stop. Though you will need to modify the oversimplistic ending, it is a fine discussion tool about physical and emotional child abuse and possible people to help.

Valusek, John E., *People Are Not For Hitting*, 3629 Mossman, Wichita, KS 67208, $2.50. Valusek asserts that children are PEOPLE. Many adults in our society condemn all forms of physical abuse, and yet discipline their children with spankings. This establishes a punishment principle in children based on finding fault, blaming and inflicting pain. According to Valusek, the "presently sanctioned practice of hitting children provides the initial impetus for teaching them how to become hitters themselves."